(a) whether Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir has urged Government to allow selected groups of Pakistani nationals to visit the State as a counter to Pakistan's propaganda of human rights violations in Kashmir; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) and (b) According to available information, Chief Minister of the State of Jammu and Kashmir had reportedly made a statement in which it was suggested, *inter alia*, that people from Pakistan be encouraged to visit the State.

It has been the policy of the Government of India to promote people to people contacts between India and Pakistan. Foreigners, including Pakistani nationals, have been visiting the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

Palestinian Foreign Minister's Visit to India

1765. SHRI K. CHANDRAN PILLAI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Palestinian Foreign Minister visited India prior to the visit of Ariel Sharon;

(b) whether any joint public statement by the Palestinian Minister and the concerned Indian authority was issued during his visit;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefore?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Dr. Nabil Sha'ath, Foreign Minister of Palestine, paid an official visit to India on August 27-September 1, 2003.

(b) to (d) No Joint Statement was issued. In a Press Release issued on the eve of his visit, it was stated that Dr. Nabil Sha'ath's visit was in response to an invitation of our External Affairs Minister. It was also stated that India has consistently supported the Palestinian cause. This longstanding position has roots in India's traditional ties with the Arab

World. India's commitment to contribute to peace and stability in this region is a cardinal element of our foreign policy. As part of a broader traditional engagement with the Palestinians, thousnds of Palestinian students having studied in India and there are extensive people-to-people contacts. India has also assisted the Palestinian National Authority in upgrading its human resource and nation building capacities.

Relations with Arab Countries

1766. SHRI SATISH PRADHAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the press report prohibiting the ignoring of the Arab World;

(b) if so, Government's views and reaction thereto; and

(c) what steps Government have taken or proposed to be taken for developing friendly ties and peace initiative with our neighbouring countries particularly Arab World while keeping relations with Israel?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) to (c) Government is aware of some press reports of India ignoring the Arab world, which are not factually correct. India's relations with the Arab world are historic and substantive. The last year has seen a number of initiatives to strengthen and rejuvenate the relationship with the Arab world. Rashtrapatiji visited the United Arab Emirates and Sudan in October 2003 and Prime Minister visited Syria in November 2003, President of Djibouti and Foreign Minister of Palestine have paid successful visits to India in May and August 2003 respectively. India has made a number of investments in Arab countries, most notably US$ 771 million in Sudan in March 2003. While relations with Israel were reinforced by a Prime Ministerial visit to India in September 2003, there has been no change in our traditional policy of support to Arab and Palestine causes.

Uranium Mining

1767. SHRI MANOJ BHATTACHARYA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have decided to hand over